



PRESS RELEASE

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Call to redefine schools as ‘children’s centres’

Children in Scotland will today (28 September) call on the Scottish Executive to take its reform of the school system a step further by redefining the concept of “school” and introducing “children and young people’s centres”.

A children and young people’s centre would not only provide universal education at primary and secondary level, but also encompass full-time pre-school services and out-of-school care for school-age children where at least half of all staff have a graduate or equivalent qualification.

Bronwen Cohen, chief executive of Children in Scotland, will call for more “radical thinking” as part of her oral evidence to the Education Committee’s Early Years Enquiry.

She said: “The concept of a children and young people’s centre builds on the concept of integrated community schools. However they would also encompass universal pre-school services and offer a ‘whole-day’ approach for school-aged children enabling them to contribute to meeting the long standing aim since 1998 of providing a pre-school service for every neighbourhood.

“The fragmented and incomplete network of services that we currently provide, which are predominantly staffed by a low-paid and generally poorly qualified workforce, cannot fulfill the many responsibilities that we now expect them to fulfill. We expect them to contribute to children’s learning and social development, offer space to play, enable parents to work and, increasingly, play a role in developmental assessment and helping children acquire and enjoy healthy lifestyles. Making sure they can achieve all this requires a clearer sense of direction and more radical thinking.”

Making sure that access to the pre-school services within a children and young people's centre are universal, and full-time, would be key. Giving every three and four-year-old in Scotland the right to a part-time pre-school place was a step in the right direction, but Children in Scotland would like to see this entitlement extended so that every child, no matter what economic group they are from, has the same universal entitlement to a full-time, whole-day place at pre-school.

More and more parents are working and seeking child care for their young children, and universal, full-time provision would not only simplify parental arrangements, it would also simplify children's lives.

Other European countries lead the way. In Norway for example, all children are entitled to a full-time place in services from the age of one until they start school or in most cases until they are 12 years old.

Ensuring that early education and childcare staff within the centres are highly qualified and well-paid staff would also be key. Research shows that children do better in settings with higher qualified staff and Children in Scotland would like to see at least half of all staff working in early years and childcare services with a graduate or equivalent qualification.

The concept of a children and young people's centre would strengthen the links between early education and childcare and school-age education, in the same way that integrated community schools have improved links between primary and secondary schools. It helps children make the transition between services, enable more effective planning and makes it clear that lifelong learning is indeed a lifelong process.

Developing children and young people's centres which are linked to other services would require ring fenced funding for local authorities. Children in Scotland also recommends that the Executive set up a national fund to encourage innovatory models for the development of such centres.

Bronwen Cohen added: "We have been pleased to see the increased recognition now given to the need to improve policies and services for young children and their families. However, our own analysis of the available statistics on the level of services suggests that there is still some way to go in meeting the aspirations expressed at the outset of this journey.

Notes for editors:

- In the period 1997-2003, there was a 5.5% net increase in

provision for pre-school children, affecting 12,204 children. Source: Cohen, Moss, Petrie and Wallace (2004), A new deal for children? Re-forming education and care in England, Scotland and Sweden, Policy Press, Bristol

- The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education project, the first major longitudinal study of the impact of pre-school education on children's development to the age of seven, found that: "Settings that have staff with higher qualifications have higher quality scores and their children make more progress". This research will be presented at Children in Scotland's annual conference in Dundee 3-4 November 2005 by Professor Pam Sammons.
- Children in Scotland supports the theory and practice of pedagogy as it exists in many European countries which offers an approach in which "learning, care, health, general well-being and development are viewed as totally inseparable, a holistic idea summed up in the pedagogical term, upbringing". Boddy, Cameron, Moss, Mooney, Petrie and Statham (2005) Introducing pedagogy into the children's workforce, TCRU, London
- Proposed innovation fund: Funding is fragmented, which creates difficulties for local authorities providing integrated services. Children in Scotland proposes a funding programme that would enable parents to develop services where they can demonstrate a need or added value and to promote the development of innovative models such as nature kindergartens.
- Children in Scotland is the national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that relevant policies, services and provisions are of the best possible quality and able to meet the needs of a diverse society.